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ABSTRACT

Staff development carried out within a conference format is multidimensional, ambiguous, potentially face-threatening, and complex. It is dependent upon the interactional work that takes place during face-to-face negotiations. The skills and knowledge of the staff developer cannot be shared with a teacher in a vacuum, but are dependent upon the social relationships of the participants and how they negotiate the purpose of the interaction and their relative status and roles within it. A case study is presented of a meeting between a staff developer and a teacher, demonstrating the social complexity of staff development and why it is so difficult to accomplish. (JD)

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WHAT'S SO HARD ABOUT STAFF DEVELOPMENT?
A STUDY IN FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION

by

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and

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November, 1984

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BIOGRAPHIES

Arlene Anang, previously a research assistant at the Institute for Research on Teaching, Michigan State University, is an assistant professor of Teacher Education at the University of Hawaii at Hilo.

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Introduction

Staff development may appear, on the surface at least, to be a straightforward effort to ensure the continuing education of teachers. In reality, however, it is fraught with such questions as to what status and roles staff developers should take (Feiman, 1977), who should set the agendas (Joyce, et. al., 1976), and what the outcome of these efforts should be (Weller, 1971). An underlying question is "What's so hard about staff development?" Why can't professional experts simply instruct classroom teachers about new ideas and strategies, or instill varies perspectives of education? Why don't the teachers always learn what was intended?

This paper will attempt to show that staff development, as carried out within a conference format, is multidimensional, ambiguous, potentially face-threatening, and extraordinarily complex. Moreover it is dependent upon the interactional work that takes place during face-to-face negotiations. The skills and knowledge of the staff developer cannot be shared with a teacher in a vacuum, but are dependent instead upon the social relationships of the participants and how they negotiate the purpose of the interaction and their relative status and roles within it. Above all, the "face" of both participants must be protected. The staff developer cannot provide help or even clarify the nature or degree of the problem, nor can the

teacher learn what was intended, unless their mutual professional efficacy is accepted.

The Study

What follows is a description of one staff developer as she works with a single teacher in a conference requested by the teacher. The purpose of the longer study (of which this description is a part) was to uncover what actually happens during the process of staff development in order to learn about the source of the difficulty and why it is such hard work. Theory and methods from ethnography (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973) and sociolinguistics (Hymes, 1973) were used to accomplish this study of one staff developer in a single school. The data source consisted of field notes taken over an eight-month period, interviews, questionnaires, and videotaped conferences (Anang, 1982).

The conference was the predominant format used by this particular staff developer although she also gave large-group presentations and workshops and observed in classrooms upon request. Teachers and administrators requested these observations and conferences to ask specific questions and/or seek help or advice. The staff developer worked in several schools in the district which in this case consisted of international schools in Southeast Asia serving the dependents of predominantly English-speaking expatriates. She spent five weeks, spread out over the school year, in this school and was paid by the school to try to help teachers and administrators.

This particular staff developer was selected for this study because of her reputation of being an effective, efficient, and optimistic professional.

What follows is an analytical description of a conference between Pete, an experienced third-grade teacher, and Betty, the staff developer. In the conference, Pete and Betty manage a social situation that is ambiguous and potentially face-threatening. Encountering each other with different purposes in mind, they sustain multiple agendas while reaching consenses about "who they are in relationship to each other" and "what they are doing together." This case study was selected from a number of cases originally analyzed because of its complexity. This complexity may have been a result of Pete and Betty's somewhat unusual relationship. Although Pete was new to the district when this interaction occurred, he had already had several encounters with Betty which could be described as social, collegial, and businesslike. Therefore, these two people had potentially established three different role relationships which could have served to organize their interactions in this conference. This was unlike most of Betty's other encounters with teachers which could be described as primarily businesslike.

The Conference

Pete has requested the conference with Betty, but it is known from an earlier interview that what he hopes to learn from her is how he might become an administrator in the

district. However, it is also known that such a topic is not a customary one about which to consult with Betty, and therefore this topic becomes the "hidden agenda." Thus, instead of outrightly stating this primary objective, Pete has written on the form by which he requests the conference that he wishes to discuss lesson planning. Betty, making a periodic visit to the district, has received the request and arranged the meeting. She arrives prepared to work with Pete on planning and is unaware not only of the "hidden agenda," but also of the extent to which he identifies her with school administration to which he aspires.

Their conference, lasting approximately forty-five minutes, is divided into three thematic phases. The first, "Getting Started," is brief, It offers the opportunity for Pete, in whose room the conference is being held, to initiate conversation with Betty. The second phase, "Discussion of Pete's Teaching," is considerably longer. The topic is lesson planning, the stated purpose of the conference. The final phase, "Discussion of Pete's Future," witnesses the turning of attention to Pete's original, unstated purpose--a career in administration.

Implicit in this model are some theoretical assumptions about the culture of schools and its effect on leadership. In any kind of face-to-face interaction the participants work together to establish both their social identities and the behaviors appropriate to them. Inherent in the establishment of social identities is the negotiation of status and

role (Goodenough, 1971; Davis, 1949). It is within this ongoing and continuous negotiation that participants determine rights, obligations, powers, privileges, and immunities in their relationship to each other. Collectively these can be thought of as institutional norms for behavior. Change in roles are made possible by shifts in communicative devices such as word choice, tone of voice, gestures, and how participants organize turntaking (Cicourel, 1972). In the encounter between Pete and Betty, their social roles are different in each of the three phases.

During the "Getting Started" phase, Pete initiates the conversation, does most of the talking, and is more physically active than Betty. He is playing the role of solicitious host while Betty is acting as the polite guest. Pete opens the conference by indirectly referring to his unstated agenda item. The following exchange ensues:

Pete: Well, I have a couple of things. Some of them don't relate to school. Shall I start with those?

Betty: Sure.

Pete: I have minimal problems with school..Really.

Betty: I'm glad to hear that.

Pete: Why? Everybody else not saying that?

Betty: Oh, no.

Pete: Just in the last ah...two or three days, I guess, I really started to feel better about the kids. But I've got to be tough as nails

with them. Y' know?

Pete made efforts to engage Betty in the conversation and gain her agreement by asking questions unrelated to the topic of planning and pausing for her responses (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974; Goody, 1978). Pete's opening remark puts into question both who was running the meeting and what he really wanted to discuss if it wasn't school. Since the topic and the purpose of the meeting were not clear, Betty did not immediately take any of the roles such as information-giver, friend, or promoter of good teaching.

Quickly, however, it becomes apparent that this effort to pursue his topic is a false start. The first signal that something is amiss occurs as Betty switches from looking directly at Pete to making broad sweeps of her head, first looking all the way around to her left, and then looking all the way back to her right. Pete changes his topic in mid-sentence each time she makes one of these sweeps, until fi-ally he initiates the topic of planning.

Pete: Well...I put down on your sheet that I wanted to discuss planning.

Betty: Right.

Pete: So I'll tell you something about planning. I can plan...for a substitute. I mean I just put plans in the book. "Here's what we're gonna do. This page, this page, this page." But I cannot plan, so far, for... how. In other words, my plans are <u>what</u>

Continued...

we're gonna do,

Betty: Well, right,

Pete: not how we're gonna do it.

Betty: Well, that's true.

Pete: Is that...is that unusual?

Betty continues to respond minimally to Pete's comments, but now her responses tend to interrupt his sentences. Pete, on the other hand, stops leaving pauses as he did earlier. Once the topic of planning is mentioned, a transition from the first phase ("Getting Started") to the second phase ("Discussion of Pete's Teaching") begins, and Betty emerges as a person ready to give information.

As Pete and Betty make the transition into discussing Pete's planning, there is a brief period in which they appear to enact the social roles of teacher and pupil. Embracing the teacher role briefly, Betty interrupts Pete, asks rhetorical questions, leans forward in her chair, uses her hands and fingers to ennumerate points, and speaks with a loud voice for emphasis (Goffman, 1961). Both participants talk of "should's" and "ought to's" related to planning and the words "right" and "all right" pepper their conversation.

Betty: Well, that's motivation, right?

Pete: We talked about natural. Yeah! (Both talking at the same time)

Betty: All right, now...

Continued...

Pete: But ya oughta, but ya oughta be able to think of those things, shouldn't you?...ahead of time? What you're gonna... How you're gonna do it?

Betty: Well, yes. You should. But not for the substitute, right?

Pete: No. Yeh. But I don't even...See, I can't sit at my desk and say, "How am I gonna introduce..."

Betty: Ohhh (voice rising)

Pete: ...this?" It all comes out, just...

Betty: Well, now, let me share with you.

Pete: O.K.

Betty: Those are strategies, but you have to get your plan down...first of all, right? You get down, y'know, maybe your objective or whatever your purpose; what you hope to accomplish. Strategy is the most important part... like in the kinda role I work with. Say, for instance, if I observe a classroom. I have data...and I've done this observation...and I may have an instrument. But the most important thing I do...is deciding how...in what environment...and how do I present that data.

Pete: I see.

As this brief period of teacher/pupil interaction continues, Pete speaks less frequently while Betty takes longer turns. He shifts often in his chair and looks away from Betty. He admits that he was feeling guilty about not doing more planning of teaching strategies, but then says that his best lessons are spontaneous. He said that he had trouble planning because he didn't know his students well enough to predict their previous knowledge since this was his first year teaching third grade. Betty's suggestion was that he needed to begin his planning by thinking of strategies for preparing and motivating students and getting them ready for the main thrust of the lesson. He then admitted that he wasn't doing that and agreed that he should.

Following Pete's face-threatening admission, Betty says quickly and reassuringly, "Well, you're coming along fine." This then begins the retreat from the teacher-pupil roles to a more collaborative interaction. This phase takes about twenty minutes and moves into the more general topic of Pete's teaching. At this point, turns between the two participants became more symmetrical with Pete speaking more and Betty less. References to successes--both Pete's and Betty's--became more frequent. There is an increased amount of movement on Pete's part and greater symmetry of movement between the two participants. At one point, Betty notices that Pete had written on the board using colored chalk, a technique she had suggested on a previous visit. They turn this observation into an occasion

for mutual support:

Betty: Colored chalk

Pete: Y'know...colored chalk. Oh yeh, colored chalk! See, I think of you every time I use colored chalk (hehe).

Betty: Right!

Pete: I use it all the time now. And the kids were, were, y'know captivated by this, y'know, and I just went over and started drawing this island and this volcano and all this stuff and they loved it.

In this phase, Pete maintains his face as a sincere and successful teacher, while Betty is able to do her job as a staff developer by giving help to Pete and addressing the stated goal of the conference.

It is only after this extended collaboration that Pete is finally able to bring up his "hidden agenda" in the third phase of the conference, "Talking about Pete's Future." Using a polite command and asserting "what I want," Pete says:

Pete: O.K. Let me ask you this. I want to get off of school for a moment.

Betty: O.K. Fine.

Pete: Uh...I have...an...interest and a need to do something in administration in the near future...

As this phase progresses, Pete asks direct questions of Betty for the first time. His role has now changed from that of a

subordinate pupil to that of an authoritative client who is seeking answers. At first, Betty suggested that Pete try to gain some experience in educational leadership by organizing the next inservice session for teachers, something she had strong ideas about. She also suggested a series of steps that should be used in organizing and planning this session. Pete asked directly how this would help him ("O.K. How does that help you get an administrative job elsewhere, other than...?) She responded that this would put him in a leadership position and exposed to teachers which would look good on his resume.

Summary

Throughout this conference, in what Goffman (1961) has called a "dance of identification," Pete and Betty use many communicative devices to achieve a consensus of "who they are" and "what they are doing." The ambiguity in their initial understandings of goals requires a great deal of collaboration and active negotiation on the parts of both participants. The ambiguity, however, also becomes a resource for Pete and Betty because it allows them to play multiple roles and serve multiple agendas.

This case study shows the sheer social complexity of staff development and why it is so hard to accomplish. Some aspects of the conference described were, of course, unique to this situation, but many others are generalizable. It is necessary in any interaction for the participants to define

their roles in relationship to each other and their purposes so that they know how to behave and speak. Social visits require different behavioral norms than do tutoring sessions or business meetings. Staff development may be even more difficult because there are fewer behavioral norms and agreed upon roles and also because it involves professional adults who must maintain their "face" even while asking for help.

This description also showed the extent to which the learner is involved in the teaching process. This partially explains why professional experts can't simply instruct teachers in new or better techniques and why teachers don't always learn what was intended. The study implies that staff developers (and other teachers) must listen and respond to students in order for learning to occur. Attempts to simplify the staff development process with check lists or "rules" belie its dynamic and interactional nature. The staff developer cannot control the outcomes of the conference any more than a classroom teacher can control what students learn. What they <u>can</u> do is recognize interactional difficulties to know when social repair work needs to occur as well as the most appropriate time to interject important, helpful, or new information.

By developing an awareness of how interactions are subtly negotiated through the mechanisms of speech and body movements, staff developers may become deliberately more self-conscious about the potential use and misuse of their status and authoritativeness in encounters with teachers. Teachers are not likely to change and improve their teaching skills in an atmosphere of force or coersion. Teachers want to maintain

authority over their professional lives and control over their professional growth. Teachers must be equally involved and respected participants throughout the interaction, yet expressions of equal involvement are not often stated directly. They are reflected in the extremely subtle and often subconscious mechanisms of behavior. The study attempts to show how these subtle and subconscious mechanisms work in order to explain the source of the ambiguity, multidimensionality, and complexity. The social demands of staff development can either contribute to or interfere with the intellectual demands.

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